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Daily Highlights

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WEDNESDAY HIGHLIGHTS

+ Senior United Nations, United States and Haitian officials hold tri-lateral conference to review situation in Haiti; United States reports to Security Council that solid foundation exists for transfer from multinational force to UNMIH.

+ Regional Conference on refugees, returnees and displaced persons begins in Bujumbura, Burundi; intense diplomatic efforts to diffuse tense situation in the country continue.

+ Human Rights Commission told a special rapporteur on minority rights needed; Special Rapporteur on religious intolerance warns entire Mediterranean could suffer repercussions of religious extremism occurring in Algeria.

+ International Conference on "Sport Against Drugs" to be held in Rome 20-21 February; UNDCP and IOC will launch programme to reduce illicit drug use among youth, particularly in developing countries.

+ UNEP and ESCAP sponsored workshop in Thailand examines sustainable coastal tourism development in Asia; will recommend ways to improve rapidly deteriorating environment of region's coasts.

+ Outer Space subcommittee hears of systematic search for "extra-terrestrial civilizations"; also considers nuclear power sources in space and problems caused by space debris.

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Special Representative, Lakdhar Brahimi and the United Nations Mission in Haiti (UNMIH), Force Commander Major-General Joseph Kinzer attended a "tri-lateral" conference in Port au Prince today with Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide and senior representatives from the United States. The meeting covered a wide range of topics, including a review of the current situation in Haiti, various aspects of the transition plan, the Haitian

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police, judicial reform and the elections. The United States delegation included Ambassador James Dobbins, the Special Co-ordinator for Haiti and the United States Ambassador to Haiti, William Lacey Swing.

Meanwhile, the United States has reported that a solid foundation was in place for the transfer of security from the mulitinational force to UNMIH. In its latest fortnightly report to the Security Council, the United States described the situation in Haiti as positive. Over the past two weeks, there had been a marked decrease in violence, and human rights monitors have reported no incidents of politically-motivated abuse for months. UNMIH is scheduled to establish its Headquarters in Port au Prince by the end of February. Advance teams will start deploying the first week of March and the contingents themselves by the end of March. The United States-led multi-national force is slowly departing and is now down to some 7,000 soldiers, a third of the original 21,000 troops deployed last September.

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A three-day regional Conference on refugees, returnees and displaced persons began in Bujumbura, Burundi today. The Conference, which is sponsored by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Organization of African Unity (OAU), might extend to a fourth day in order to allow a summit of central and east African Heads of State, according to a United Nations spokesman.

Meanwhile, the situation in Burundi remained tense because of the minority Tutsi opposition party's declaration and implementation of a general strike throughout Bujumbura. There have been intensive diplomatic efforts to contain the situation in Burundi, including recent visits by the Security Council special mission and the Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Lansana Kouyate.

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The Commission on Human Rights should name a special rapporteur on minority rights who could address situations warranting immediate reaction. Such a person could also carry out "preventive diplomacy" visits to monitor the implementation of the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities. Addressing the Commission as it discussed migrant workers, minority rights and religious intolerance, the representative of Finland said that the costs of such a mechanism would be modest compared to those of inter-group conflicts and violations of minority rights.

The representative of China said that a number of State-financed projects in Tibet had greatly promoted the objective of protecting Tibetan Buddhism and the traditional culture. More than 1,600 temples were open for worship, with more than 40,000 monks and nuns. China had observed the principles of protecting religious freedom as outlined in the international human rights instruments and had adopted legislative, judicial and administrative measures for their implementation.

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Introducing his report, the Special Rapporteur on religious intolerance told the Commission the dividing lines between religious conflicts and other types of conflict, as well as between religious intolerance and political persecution, were not always clear. Progress towards religious freedom was not sufficiently strong. He said that the entire Mediterranean would suffer the repercussions of religious intolerance and extremism occurring in Algeria.

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The use of sports as a means of reducing the illicit demand for drugs, particularly among youth in developing countries, will be the focus of a two-day international conference to be held in Rome on 20 and 21 February. The Conference on Sport Against Drugs will bring together some 200 participants, including representatives of National Olympic Committees, athletes, journalists, governments, United Nations entities and non-governmental organizations. It has been organized jointly by the United Nations International Drug Control Programme (UNDCP) and the European Olympic Committees on behalf of the International Olympic Committee (IOC).

During the Conference, the UNDCP and the IOC will co-sponsor a series of projects aimed at using sports to promote a healthy, drug-free lifestyle among youth, particularly in developing countries. Participants are expected to share their experience in combating drug abuse by promoting the athletic values of self-discipline, physical training and team spirit. They will also explore the possibility of using messages from famous athletes and the holding of sports events to launch information campaigns against drugs.

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The rapidly deteriorating environment on Asia's coasts and its improvement is the focus of a regional and national workshop taking place in Thailand this week. The workshop is organized by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). It will address sustainable coastal tourism development, with emphasis on regional needs and also focus on tourism development in various parts of Thailand.

According to the Director of the Paris-based Industry and Environment Centre of UNEP, Jacqueline Aloisi de Larderel, East Asia and the Pacific will become the fastest growing tourism region in the world and sustainable coastal tourism was a crucial issue. The regional workshop aims to foster exchanges between participants on conditions for sustainable coastal tourism development. It will also prepare recommendations to help them define and implement their own policies in their respective countries, according to Suvit Yodmani, Director and Regional Representative of the UNEP Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific.

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The Scientific and Technical Subcommittee of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space has been told of efforts by American and

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Australian scientists to systematically search for extra-terrestrial civilizations on distant planets. The Australian representative described how researchers were using the Parkes radio telescope in his country to examine some 1,000 stars similar to the sun. They hoped to find planetary systems that might support advanced civilizations or detect radio frequencies that could be made by technology similar to our own.

Current standards for the use of nuclear power sources in outer space should be revised to adhere to current principles on radiation protection and nuclear safety in earth-based contexts, a representative of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) told the Subcommittee. She said many of the standards and guidelines issued by the IAEA might be applicable to the safety of nuclear power sources in outer space.

On the problem of space debris, several speakers recommended the development of a multi-year plan for dealing with the issue. The representative of Canada said the risks of impact from orbital debris could become a hindrance to continued access to space and called for prompt, concerted, multilateral efforts to study the phenomenon. The representative of the Philippines called for appropriate measures to remove all inactive satellites from orbit, including the organizing of "scavenging missions" aimed at minimizing space debris. Space law should serve and protect all humanity, including those who lacked space capabilities, he said.

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